

We Are the Other People: oberon (Otter) Zell

"Ding-dong!" goes the doorbell. Is it Avon calling? Or perhaps Ed McMahon with my three million dollars? No, it's Yahweh's Witlesses again, just wanting to have a nice little chat about the Bible... Boy, did they ever come to the wrong house! So we invite them in: "Enter freely and of your own will..." (Hey, it's Sunday morning, nothing much going on, why not have a little entertainment?) Diane and I amuse ourselves watching their expressions as they check out the living room: great horned owl on the back of my chair; ceremonial masks and medicine skulls of dragons and unicorns on the wall; crystals, wands, staffs, swords; lots of Goddess figures and several altars; boa constrictors draped in amorous embrace over the elkhorn; white doves sitting in the hanging planters; cats and weasels underfoot; iron dragon snorting steam atop the wood stove; posters and paintings of wizards and dinosaurs and witchy women, some proudly naked; sculptures of mythological beasties and lots more dinosaurs; warp six on the star-filled viewscreen of my computer; a five-foot model of the USS Enterprise and the skeleton of a plesiosaur hanging from the ceiling; very, very many books, most of them dealing with obviously weird subjects... To say nothing of the great horned owl perched on the back of my chair and the Unicorn grazing in the front yard. You know; early Addams Family decor. And then, of course, it being late in the morning, you can expect Morning Glory to come wandering out naked, looking for her wake-up cup of tea. Morning Glory naked is a truly impressive sight, and the Witlesses look as if she'd set titties on stun as they stand immobilized, hands clasped over their genitals.

With the stage set and all the actors in place, the show is ready to begin. Their mission, of course, is to save our heathen souls by turning us on to "The Word of the Lord"- their Bible. I guess they figger some of us just haven't heard about it yet, and we're all eagerly awaiting their joyous tidings of personal salvation through giving our rational faculties to Jesus. Every time they come around, I look forward to trying out a new riposte. Sure, it may be cruel and sadistic of me, but hey, I didn't call them up and ask them to come over; they entered at their own risk! This time should be pretty good. After letting them run off their basic rap while lovely Morning Glory serves us all hot herb tea, I innocently remark: "But none of that applies to us. We have no need for salvation because we don't have original sin. We are the Other People."

"Hunh? What?" they reply eloquently. It's clear they've never heard this one before. "

Right," I say. "It's all in your Bible." And I proceed to tell them the story, using their own book for reference: (Genesis 1:26) The [Elohim] said, "Let us make humanity in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth." Elohim is a plural word, including male and female, and should properly be translated "Gods" or "Pantheon." (1: 27) The Gods created humanity in the image of themselves, In the image of the Gods they created them, Male and female they created them. (1:28) The Gods blessed them, saying to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth."

Now clearly, here we are talking about the original creation of the human species: male and female. All the animals, plants, etc. have all been created in previous verses. This is before the Garden of Eden, and Yahweh is not mentioned as the creator of these people.

The next chapter talks about how Yahweh, an individual member of the Pantheon, goes about assembling his own special little botanical and zoological Garden in Eden, and making his own little man to inhabit it: (Gen 2:7) Yahweh God fashioned a man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus the man became a living being. (2:8) Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. (2:9) Yahweh God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. (2:15) Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it. Now this next is crucial: note Yahweh's precise words: (2:16) Then Yahweh God gave the man this admonition, "You may eat indeed of all the trees in the garden. (2:17) Nevertheless of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die." Fateful words, those. We will refer back to this admonition later.

Then Yahweh decides to make a woman to go with the man. Now, don't forget that the Pantheon had earlier created a whole population of people, "male and female," who are presumably doing just fine somewhere "outside the gates of Eden." But this set-up in Eden is Yahweh's own little experiment, and will unfold to its own separate destiny. (2:21) So Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. (2:22) Yahweh God built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. Right. Man gives birth to woman. Sure he does. But that's the way the story is told here. (2:25) Now both of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they felt no shame in front of each other. Well, of course not! Why should they? But take careful note of those words, as they also will prove to be significant...

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Now this next part is where it starts to get interesting. Enter the Serpent: (Gen. 3:1) The serpent was the most subtle of all the wild beasts that Yahweh God had made. It asked the woman, "Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" (3:2) The woman answered the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. (3:3) "But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, 'You must not eat it, nor touch it, under pain of death.'" (3:4) Then the serpent said to the woman, "No! You will not die! (3:5) "God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." What a remarkable statement! "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." The Serpent directly contradicts Yahweh. Obviously, one of them has to be lying. Which one, do you suppose? And, if the serpent speaks true, wouldn't you wish to eat of the magic fruit? Wouldn't it be a good thing, to become "like gods, knowing good and evil"? Or is it preferable to remain in ignorance?

(Gen. 3:6) The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was desirable for the knowledge that it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She gave some also to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. (3:7) Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves loincloths. The author makes an interesting assumption here: that if you realize you are naked you will automatically want to cover yourself. Further implications will unfold shortly...

(Gen. 3:8) The man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. (3:9) But Yahweh God called to the man. "Where are you?" he asked. (3:10) "I heard the sound of you in the garden," he replied. "I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." (3:11) "Who told you that you were naked?" he asked. "Have you been eating of the tree I forbade you to eat?"

And so the sign of the Fall becomes modesty. Take note of this. The descendants of Adam and Eve will be distinguished throughout history from virtually all other peoples by their obsessive modesty taboos, wherein they will feel ashamed of being naked. It follows that those who feel no shame in being naked are, by definition, not carriers of this spiritual disease of original sin!

(Gen. 3:12) The man replied, "It was the woman you put with me; she gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Right. Blame the woman. What a turkey! (3:13) Then Yahweh God asked the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman replied, "The serpent tempted me and I ate." So of course she blames the serpent. But just what did the serpent do that was so evil? Why, he called Yahweh a liar! Was he wrong? Let's see... (3:21) Yahweh God made clothes out of skins for the man and his wife, and they put them on. Out of skins? This means that Yahweh had to kill some innocent animals to pander to Adam and Eve's new obsession with modesty!

And now we come to the crux of the Fall. Yahweh had said back there in chapter (2:17), regarding the fruit of the tree of knowledge, that "on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die." The Serpent, on the other hand, had contradicted Yahweh in chapter (3:4-5): "No! You will not die! God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." So what actually happened? Who lied and who told the truth about this remarkable fruit? The answer is given in the next verse: (3:22) Then Yahweh God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, with his knowledge of good and evil. He must not be allowed to stretch his hand out next and pick from the tree of life also, and eat some and live forever."

Get that? Yahweh himself admits that he had lied! In fact, and in Yahweh's own words, the Serpent spoke the absolute truth! And moreover, Yahweh tells the rest of the Pantheon that he intends to evict Adam (and presumably Eve as well) to keep them from gaining immortality to go with their newly-acquired divine knowledge. To prevent them, in other words, from truly becoming gods! So who, in this story, comes off as a benefactor of humanity, and who comes off as a tyrant? THE SERPENT NEVER LIED!

This story, to digress slightly, bears a remarkable resemblance to a contemporary tale from ancient Greece. In that version, the Serpent (later identified as Lucifer, the Light-Bearer) may be equated with the heroic titan Prometheus, who championed humanity against the tyranny of Zeus, who wished for people to be mere slaves of the gods. Prometheus, whose name means "forethought," gave people wisdom, intelligence, and fire stolen from Olympus. Moreover, he ordained the portions of animal sacrifice so that humans got the best parts (the meat and hides) while the portion that was burned to the gods was the bones and fat. In punishment for this defiance of his divine authority, Zeus condemned Prometheus to a terrible punishment for an immortal: to be chained to a mountain in the Caucasus, where Zeus' gryphon/eagle (actually a Lammergeir) would devour his liver each day. It would grow back each night. Zeus promised to relent if Prometheus would reveal his great secret knowledge: Who would succeed Zeus as supreme god? Prometheus refused to tell, but history has revealed the answer... The interesting thing about all this is that the Greeks properly regarded Prometheus as a noble hero in his defiance of unjust tyranny. One may wonder why the Serpent is not so well regarded. On the contrary, snakes are

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loathed throughout Christendom. (3:23) So Yahweh God expelled him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he had been taken. (3:24) He banished the man, and in front of the garden of Eden he posted the cherubs, and the flame of a flashing sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

So that's it for the Fall. But the story of Adam and Eve doesn't end there. (Gen 4:1) The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain... (4:2) She gave birth to a second child, Abel, the brother of Cain. Now Abel became a shepherd and kept flocks, while Cain tilled the soil. (4:3) Time passed and Cain brought some of the produce of the soil as an offering for Yahweh, (4:4) while Abel, for his part, brought the first-born of his flock and some of their fat as well. Yahweh looked with favor on Abel and his offering. But he did not look with favor on Cain and his offering, and Cain was very angry and downcast. Well, why shouldn't he be? Both brothers had brought forth their first fruits as offerings, but Yahweh rejected the vegetables and only accepted the blood sacrifice. This was to set a gruesome precedent: (4:8) Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out;" and while they were in the open country, Cain set on his brother Abel and killed him.

Accursed and marked for fratricide, (4:16) Cain left the presence of Yahweh and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. We can assume that the phrase "left the presence of Yahweh" implies that Yahweh is a local deity, and not omnipresent. Now Eden, according to (Gen. 2:14-15), was situated at the source of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, apparently right where Lake Van is now, in Turkey. "East of Eden," therefore, would probably be along the shores of the Caspian Sea, right in the Indo-European heartland. Cain settled in there, among the people of Nod, and married one of the women of that country. Here, for the first time, is specifically mentioned the "other people" who are not of the lineage of Adam and Eve. i.e: the Pagans.

So let's look at this story from another viewpoint: There we were, around six thousand years ago, living in our little farming communities around the Caspian Sea, in the land of Nod, when this dude with a terrible scar comes stumbling in out of the sunset. He tells us this bizarre story, about how his mother and father had been created by some god named Jahweh, and put in charge of a beautiful garden somewhere out west, and how they had gotten thrown out for disobedience after eating some of the landlord's forbidden magic fruit of enlightenment. He tells us of murdering his brother, as the god of his parents would only accept blood sacrifice, and of receiving that scar as a mark so that all would know him as a fratricide.

The poor guy is really a mess psychologically, obsessed with guilt. He is also obsessively modest, insisting on wearing clothes even in the hottest summer, and he has a hard time with our penchant for skinny-dipping in the warm inland sea. He seems to believe that he is tainted by the "sin" of his parent's disobedience; that it is in his blood, somehow, and will continue to contaminate his children and his children's children.

One of our healing women takes pity on the poor sucker, and marries him... (4:17) Cain had intercourse with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. He became the builder of a town, and he gave the town the name of his son Enoch.

With both of their first sons not turning out very well, Adam and Eve decided to try again: (4:25) Adam had intercourse with his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom she named Seth... (4:26) A son was also born to Seth, and he named him Enosh. This man was the first to invoke the name of Yahweh. Now it doesn't mention here where Seth's wife came from. Another woman from Nod, possibly, or maybe someone from another neolithic community downstream in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. But her folks also, cannot be of the lineage of Adam and Eve, and must also be counted among "the other people."

But whatever happened to Adam? After all, way back there in chapter Gen. 2:17, warning Adam about the magic fruit of knowledge, Jahweh had told him that "on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die." So, when did Adam die? (Gen. 5:4) Adam lived for eight hundred years after the birth of Seth and he became the father of sons and daughters. (5:5) In all, Adam lived for nine hundred and thirty years; then he died. Hey, that's pretty good! Nine hundred and some odd years isn't bad for a man who's been told he's gonna die the next day!

Well, the story goes on, and maybe next time the Witlesses come to visit I'll tell more of it. But suffice it to say that those of us who are not of Semitic descent (i.e., not of the lineage of Adam and Eve) cannot share in the Original Sin that comes with that lineage. Being that the Bible is the story of that lineage, of Adam and Eve's descendants and their special relationship with their particular god, Yahweh, it follows that this is not the story of the rest of us. We may have been Cain's wife's people, or Seth's wife's people, or some other people over the hill and far away, but whichever people the rest of us are, as far as the Bible is concerned, we are the Other People, and so we are continually referred to throughout.

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Later books of the Bible are filled with admonitions to the followers of Jahweh to "learn not the ways of the Pagans..." (Jer 10:2) with detailed descriptions of exactly what it is we do, such as erect standing stones and sacred poles, worship in sacred groves and practice divination and magic. And worship the sun, moon, stars and the "Queen of Heaven." "You must not behave as they do in Egypt where once you lived; you must not behave as they do in Canaan where I am taking you. You must not follow their laws." (Lev 18:3) For Yahweh, as he so clearly emphasizes, is not the god of the Pagans. We have our own lineage and our own heritage, and our tale is not told in the Bible. We were not "made" like clay figurines by a male deity out of "dust from the soil." We were born of our Mother the Earth, and have evolved over aeons in Her nurturing embrace. All of us, in our many and diverse tribes, have creation myths and legends of our origins and history; some of these tales may even be actually true.

Like the descendants of Adam and Eve, many of us also have stories of great floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and other cataclysms that wiped out whole communities of our people, wherein "I alone survived to tell the tale." Nearly all of our ancestral tribes (and especially those of us who today are reclaiming our own Pagan heritage) lack that peculiar obsessive body modesty that seems to be a hallmark of the original sin alluded to in the story of the Fall. We can be naked and unashamed! Why, our Goddess even tells us, "as a sign that you are truly free, you shall be naked in your rites." Not being born into sin, we have no need of salvation, and no need of a Messiah to redeem our sinful souls.

Neither heaven nor hell is our destination in the afterlife; we have our own various arrangements with our own various deities. The Bible is not our story; we have our own stories to tell, and they are many and diverse. In a long life, you may get to hear many of them... May you live long and prosper!